

# How the Mind Works

WARNING: I'm a seer, not a scientist; I'm an entertainer, not an expert. With a sword.

NOTE: This one is super long. Because it's the most important one.

## Super Abstract

There's an animal in there with you, and you're surrendering your attention to it.

Stare at something, without looking away, for an hour. Do your best to keep whatever it is you're staring at in sharp focus throughout. It's hard to do because the animal fights you. *It* wants to control where the eyes go, where *the attention* goes. Establish your dominance over the animal by refusing to let go.

It's the bronco. You're the cowboy. Can you tame it?

## CAUTION: Just an Act

Remember, Slippin Fall is not an expert. He's not only *not* a psychologist, he's not even a scientist. Or a Ph.D. He's a wizard in a pointy hat with moons and stars on it.

**If you choose to take any of the advice given in the following *performance*, do it with a licensed mental health expert in tow.**

I don't say much more than this: teach yourself to take back control of your attention. And herein lies the danger: the animal fights back. And the animal fights dirty. It knows who you are and what you hide from yourself.

## Abstract

There are two core insights into the human mind that, when put together, explain everything worth knowing about it. Here in the abstract, let me introduce just those two insights, one at a time. Even if you go no further, it will give you something to chew on as you walk away.

## Two Modes

Did you know that there are some species of birds that fly over the ocean for days on end without ever touching down? They manage it by keeping one hemisphere of their brains awake and alert, and the other in a deep sleep. The eye opposite the sleeping hemisphere stays closed; the other eye stays open. After a while they switch it up and sleep on the other side.

Well, we humans do essentially the same thing, but in a different way. We *interleave* waking and sleeping. We're always doing just one or the other, but for such fleeting snippets of time we don't notice we're flipping back and forth. We require the flipping back and forth—as opposed to doing them both at once—to keep from hallucinating.

This “waking sleep” trick is *the* thing that gives us humans such a great advantage over all the other species of animal. For some Darwinian reason, we doubled-down on the processing of information by carrying our dreams with us into the waking hours. And lucky for us, it turned out that the previous survival champions—*speed and strength*—could be trumped by *strategy*, as long as you did strategy right. And we *did* do strategy right.

So, for the remainder of this text, shoulder this assumption: thought is sleep. Thoughts are little baby dreams. You're sleeping when you think.

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The other mode is the senses. The senses define *wakefulness*; to process the senses is to be awake; to see what you're looking at is to be awake.

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What this means is that during the day, we're always engaged in both sleep and the senses, switching back and forth between them many times a second. We're watching two movies at once. The percentage of each that we experience across any given span of time depends on how interesting the world around us is. If there's a big hairy spider, *like right there!*, or we've just come up on the edge of the Grand Canyon, or we're locked in orgasm, then we're 100% senses. But if we get stranded someplace boring without our phones, we're 90% thought. If we surrender that last 10%, our neck muscles have stopped working and we're *fully* asleep.

So that's the first insight—we sleep on our feet by serially sipping thought whenever we can, like addicts on a crack pipe. (Psychologists call this “the default mode.”) This is advantageous evolutionarily because sleep is where information gets processed. All animals who dream do so in order to process recently-gathered information. But we do it more. And when you do more of something—of *anything*—you can't avoid getting better and better at it.

## **Two Brains, One Inside the Other**

The second insight is the one that I introduced in the Super Abstract—that there are two completely different brains cooperating with one another to juggle the waking and sleeping. One is the experiential *animal* brain. The other is the rational *human* brain. The respective functionings of these two are so monumentally different that they must communicate through a translator. They're far too dissimilar to ever be blended into a single component. And even if they weren't, evolution hasn't had nearly enough time to do the blending.

Each brain builds its own model of the world, which is to say that each one has an opinion about appropriate behavior at every moment in time. The *animal* brain, which psychologists call

**unconsciousness**, determines correct behavior by averaging across previous *experiences*. For *that* kind of brain, the correct behavior is always what worked best in past similar situations. This is exactly how a dog's brain works, for example. Think about how slowly and methodically you must train a dog. Well, you have a version of a very similar animal brain inside *your* head, and it too must be trained like a dog is trained. (It's more like a chimp of course, so it learns more quickly than a dog, but most of us have no experience training chimps.)

The *rational* brain, which psychologists call **consciousness**, determines correct behavior with *logic*. It calculates what should be done with *if's*, *then's*, *and's* and *but's*. It, too, cares about past behavior, and what worked best last time, but that's just part of the *input* for the logic, not the final answer. Your experience of reality is from inside this rational brain.

But the animal brain runs the show. It was shaped over millions of years with *speed* as its priority, not rationality—which is exactly what you'd expect. It had to achieve *survival*. It had to escape predators and catch prey. The johnny-come-lately *logical* brain you're a part of is but a velvet cloth caressing the survival jewel that is the animal brain.

However, despite this vast gulf in magnificence, the logical brain, if it chooses to, can make itself the alpha brain in the relationship between the two; if it does, its opinions on correct behavior will be followed in real time whenever two conditions are met. (1) The logical brain is there to *deliver* the opinions, and (2) there's enough time for the animal to wait for the opinions to be arrived at. (The logical brain is glacially slow.)

When the logical brain is *not* there to give its opinions (it's busy inside a daydream or engrossed in some content), or when there *isn't* time to give the opinions (it's a life-or-death situation), the animal brain decides how to behave on its own, as a perfect robot, every one of its actions based on what worked best (by *its* reckoning) in previous similar situations.

## The Roadmap

Here's how we'll proceed. I'll start by expanding a bit on what was just introduced in the Abstract, then we'll quickly peek at how everything works together. After that, we'll examine how this view of things explains lots of everyday phenomena. When we get there, if you don't find yourself saying over and over again, "oh, but of course", then you should stop reading. Finally, we'll go into more detail on how the two brains cooperate—with diagrams! This is not just some fly-by-night operation here.

## Meet Unconsciousness (The Animal)

Unconsciousness, the animal brain, is the running system in the human. All animals run it and, like it or not, we're animals. The animal brain is simple, fast and experienced-based. There's no logic or meaning inside it *whatsoever*. Truth (about correct behavior) is determined solely by frequency of occurrence.

Unconsciousness maintains a running inventory of *memories of situations*, each one connected to all the experienced situations that immediately preceded and followed it, like cities connected by roads. The more frequently a road gets traveled with good results, the wider it gets. Unconsciousness is a perpetual journey inside this landscape. It (the animal inside you) is forever choosing to go down the widest road out of the city it just arrived in. It's completely automated, and fast as hell.

Amazingly, that drop-dead-simple algorithm does *everything*, including running consciousness. Consider all of the mind-boggling complexity of the human body—from the corralling of the very particles zipping around down there at the bottom, all the way up to the philosophical conversations happening up here at the top. It's all being managed by that simple algorithm. Do-whatever-worked-best-before thinks the thoughts, speaks the words, snuggles the infant, dribbles the basketball, and pulls the trigger. It does everything. It's been slowly churning simplicity into brilliance for four billion years.

And what happens when there are no roads heading out of a "city" (situation) that unconsciousness has just arrived in—what happens if it's a brand new situation? It freezes. And then runs.

### **Animals Learn *Everything* Through Repetition**

Learn a physical skill—or memorize something—and you become intimately acquainted with the stupid genius that is unconsciousness. It gains expertise by repeating an action over and over and over, calculating across the feedback from each repetition. It's completely blind to the goal (unless it's instinctual) and finds its way through the semantic darkness to the goal by averaging across the feedback from the weighted repetitions. It's locked into a game of Battleship™ with the world, receiving feedback limited to just "hit" or "miss (by this much)". And from just those responses it slowly homes in on the target. The more it tries, the closer it gets, so long as the hit/miss feedback is accurate.

Sometimes *consciousness* is providing that feedback, like when we're trying to perfect a tennis serve and the rules of the game must be interpreted. But typically, it's pain and pleasure that provide the feedback.

Let me repeat myself: everything you do was learned this way. By trial and error. Not necessarily in your lifetime, but at some point in the past. When you stand back and contemplate the enormity of the complexity of human behavior, with all of it sprung from such a simple, blind algorithm, it breaks the brain in the same way natural selection does. As it should! Trial and error is the most efficient algorithm for navigating complexity. If that hasn't been proven mathematically yet, it will be.

B. F. Skinner famously got pigeons to perform arbitrary series of actions to get fed. This is the same system at work. Skinner would wait until a pigeon randomly performed some action and then immediately feed it. The pigeon would take note of the "hit" and repeat the action in order to get fed again. And Skinner would feed it again, but intentionally not *every* time, so that the

pigeon would get obsessed with figuring it out. Skinner could then slowly alter the behavior until the pigeon was pecking in a circle around a certain point on the ground, while standing on one foot, with its wings partially extended—all by just *not* feeding the pigeon immediately after a correct performance, but waiting instead until after one additional behavior had come randomly along and choosing to feed after *that* behavior, making it, now, the final action in the sequence.

Skinner was breeding memories. Each time he fed the pigeon he was selecting among its memories for further reinforcement. Consciousness does the same thing from *inside* the human. We'll talk about that in just a bit. But the point here is that unconsciousness is the *reactive* mind; it's forever averaging across memories. So, in order to drive its behavior in a particular direction, its *memories* must be altered. New memories can be added through new experience, or, as we'll soon see, by secretly tweaking the abstractions undergirding existing memories. Altering the animal's behavior must be done through the manipulation of *its memories* because animals don't have belief systems.

### **The Animal Brain is the Realtime Brain**

It makes sense that *all* animals would possess this same core system if any one of them did. It's hard to imagine how it could be improved upon without slowing it down. Its extreme simplicity makes it fast and flexible, and fast and flexible keeps animals alive. Deviate from that well-honed algorithm and you go extinct. (Unless you've got a shell you can recede into, or a weapon you can defend your ground with.)

This is an important point. One of my two main claims is that there are two wildly different, but cooperating, systems at the core of the mind, not some complex mishmash of a compromise of a system that intertwines the two. Any mishmash, even if it could be achieved—say with logical road signs deftly placed in the animal's "city" landscape of memories—would not work. Slowing down to read the signs would take too long. We'd all be dead.

## **Consciousness (Our Home)**

### **The Animal Brain Feeds Us the Senses**

You're walking down a street on the sidewalk in a safe and quiet neighborhood. As you proceed, your eyes are flitting all around, checking the contours of the ground that you're about to step through, and scanning the world a bit further ahead. This dance of surveillance, at its essence, is a series of snapshots. The eyes jump from spot to spot, resting at each one just long enough to bring it into focus and check it for danger.

You can watch yourself doing this, but it's a little tricky because you have to let it happen without interrupting it. If you just peek at it from the side, it's easy to get the feel of it. And what you're feeling is that *the animal brain* is doing all this work. *You're* not driving that behavior. How could you be? You're normally off in your thoughts as the animal wrestles with the hard work of navigating reality, just as all animals do when they move. The *animal* drives the body through reality. The-you-that-thinks is not required for that work.

Another thing you sense as you watch your animal brain navigate is that your view of the world—your *experience* of the world—is second hand. Only the animal captures reality directly through the senses. What *you* experience is a cleaned up version of reality being shown to you in consciousness a fraction of a second after the animal has experienced it. It's clear that it works this way when you mysteriously do something without knowing *why* you're doing it until after it's been done, like ducking from an incoming projectile, or pulling your hand away from a hot stove. In the same way, as you watch your animal navigate the sidewalk, you can sense that decisions about where to step next are being made before you're aware of them.

## **We Choose to Look In or Look Out**

When you're alone (and awake), at every instant in time, you have a choice: pay attention to what the animal is experiencing or pay attention to what a *simulated* animal is experiencing in a *simulated* environment—in your thoughts.

If you choose *not* to choose, or don't realize you *can* choose, the choice is made for you. You experience whichever one is more interesting. Without your phone in hand, the *inside* world of thought almost always wins the contest because the *outside* world is so boring most of the time.

But *with* your phone in hand, you can scour it for something engaging. If you can't find anything on your phone more interesting than your thoughts, or if the thing you do find turns dull after a while, you'll automatically start wandering in your thoughts, without being asked if you wanted to.

In large doses, this wandering in thought is toxic. People who are deprived of *all* interesting content for long stretches, like people in long-term solitary confinement, tend to lose their minds. They can't escape their daydreams. They drown in their thoughts.

You, like them, are asleep when you're in your daydreams. And (for our purposes here) sleep is defined as that state in which whatever's in short-term memory is not being written to long-term memory. So when you're in the daydream, you're fully present and fully experiencing the journey through your thoughts, but (except for the tail end of it perhaps) you forget it all. And you're unaware that it's being forgotten.

What you're experiencing inside the daydream is a back and forth between two attorneys, one of them representing the interests of *the self*, and the other representing the interests of *the group*. Ego vs. conscience. Together they're trying to make sense of the world *logically*; they're tweaking the *logical* model of the world owned by consciousness. (As opposed to the *experiential* model of the world owned by the animal.)

It's essentially a game of Tetris™. Ego and conscience are on an endless quest to collapse disparate information into abstractions, both to save space and to capture generalizations. Ego argues for the interpretations of reality that benefit the self, and conscience argues for those that benefit the group. This struggle occurs *inside* the head of each individual in order to save the group the trouble of doing it *between* individuals. If I had no way of simulating your reaction to

my grabbing of the last donut, nor you mine, we'd fight a lot about donuts when we could be doing other things more beneficial to the group.

### Daydreams Get Written Out As Animal Memories

Ego and conscience are *good-faith* lawyers; they argue their cases hard, but bow to the good points of the other side and come to a compromise both can live with. In some people ego is stronger, and in others, conscience is. But in almost everyone, all decisions are compromises.

Now here's the keystone in this whole vision of the mind I'm painting for you. The compromise that the ego and conscience reach, this change to the *logical* model of the world they've just made in the daydream, also gets written out to the *animal's* model of the world, *behind its back*.

The animal, as you will recall, is building out, and navigating with, an (experiential) model of the world which we described as cities connected by roads, with each city representing an abstracted "situation", and each road *out* of a city representing the situations previously reached from the current one in the past. The width of each road represents how successful that road has been. This design allows the animal to implement behavior without ever needing to stop and decide. It always just zips right on through on the widest road out.

Now here's the clever hack that lets the two wildly different brains cooperate: the compromise that was reached by ego and conscience in the daydream gets written out as changes to *the widths of the roads*. No actual memories need get inserted, just tweaks to the abstractions that are the roads. And in this way, the (abstracted) past experience of the animal gets changed!

**This means that over time the animal's behavior increasingly *mimics* rational behavior, but never actually is.**

This is why an LLM like ChatGPT can look smart when it really isn't. LLMs are only *half* the story of the mind, *half* the answer to a human-like intelligence. (Kahneman's System 1). In other words, LLMs are able to implement a very close facsimile of the *pseudo-logical animal* brain we have inside us.

And how is this writing out of the ego/conscience compromise from one brain to the other accomplished? There's a translator. The logical compromise that was reached using a natural language (like English) inside the daydream gets sent across the nervous system as *emotions* that change the widths of the roads in the animal's model of the world. **Emotions are animal language on the wire.**

So, to answer the question of why consciousness "feels like" something when it shouldn't need to (the so-called hard problem of consciousness)...well, it *does* need to, because that's the nature of the system. Communication between consciousness and unconsciousness is being passed over the nervous system as emotion, and consciousness *feels* that because consciousness is continuously being fed a (cleaned-up) copy of the nervous system. Which can be unplugged with anesthesia.

## First Summary

So let's put this all together. There are two brains which cooperate, but not by being massively intertwined. One merely *feeds into* the other. Their modes of operation are so completely different that no other method of joining them could work.

Each brain builds its own model of the world for determining correct behavior. One is an animal's brain (unconsciousness) and one is a human brain (consciousness). The animal brain determines correct behavior by averaging over behaviors that worked best in past similar circumstances. The human brain determines it with logic. Consciousness's logic secretly tweaks unconsciousness's memory so as to alter its future behavior.

But what kind of an animal is this exactly? It's an animal that is, by nature, programmed to find his place in a dominance hierarchy. He strives to be dominant but will submit to dominance *over* him if that dominance is earned, and is consistent. By default the animal *assumes* dominance until stripped of it. Specifically, he wants to navigate the body on his own, using his own behavioral model—with consciousness shunted off into a daydream. And this makes perfect sense from his point of view. If nothing important is happening in the present moment, then that particular allocation of duties is the ideal state for him. He wins in two ways. By handling the banal present moment on his own, he's freeing up the logical *human* brain to optimize the behavioral models in daydreams. The benefit to the animal of the work being done inside the daydream is that it improves his *future* driving—his future unattended behavior will increasingly mimic rational behavior.

In this state, with the animal driving and the human daydreaming, the animal is considered dominant because **dominance is defined by which brain is making the decisions in the present moment**. The human brain can turn the tables and establish its dominance over the animal by keeping itself in the present moment. But to do this effectively, the human must be constantly sending a message to the animal (through the emotions): "I'm here and I'm in control." This is accomplished by keeping the fidelity of the senses high, and is known colloquially as self-confidence. This self-confidence beacon that claims and maintains dominance can't be run from inside a daydream.

A human brain that fails to establish dominance over its animal gets locked inside daydreams, where it grows harried and fearful. Mental health—by this view of the mind—can be directly measured by the extent of the human's ability to dominate his animal, to keep himself awake, observant, and out of his daydreams, until he chooses to enter them.

This dominance battle that I'm claiming exists inside the mind can be easily demonstrated/experienced. Stare at something, which is to declare to the animal that you're in control of where the eyes shall stay. Try to keep the animal's eyes fixed in that one place for as long as you can. You can feel the animal fight it, and he will usually win, and quickly. You will look away.



Time yourself. Can you do it for a full minute? If you can, you're pretty good. But can you do it for an hour, easily, without constantly feeling the tug of something that (to quote Dylan) "calls for you"? Why not? Do you tell yourself that it's actually very easy, that you could easily do it if you wanted, but it's a waste of time? Well, then prove it to yourself by sucking it up and demonstrating that you can withstand "boring" for a full hour one time. You'll be surprised how difficult it is, how easily you drift off and forget what you were even trying to accomplish no matter how tough-minded you think you are.

Meditation, as practiced by monks in temples, is declaring to the animal that the attention shall stay on the breath. It's the simplest possible one-on-one battle for the attention. It's the pristine attention dojo.

So, tell me. Who owns your attention? You or your animal?

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## Everyday Phenomena Explained

This is the section where I try to convince you this is the right model. If I can't, then I'm wrong, or I've done a poor job describing it. If you don't buy these explanations, there's no reason for you to read any further.

### Racism

Imagine a white boy born to a family living in the Deep South in the USA. He's raised in a tight-knit racist community and is led to believe that whites are superior to blacks in every way. He never hears any other opinions on the matter until his family is begrudgingly forced to have him enter the public schools.

On the first day of school, he gets into a fight with a black boy. In the aftermath, the school administrators sit the white boy down and thoroughly convince him that he's wrong about blacks. And, by golly, he *is* convinced. He's not faking it. He cries. He asks to apologize to the boy he fought with. He says he wants to apologize to *all* the kids in the school, black *and* white, each one privately. And he does. He just didn't know. He's sorry and he's ashamed.

Is this boy still a racist?

Absolutely. Although his logical, conscious mind has been utterly convinced that skin color means nothing, his reactive, animal mind is still very far from being won over. The animal mind will still manifest fear and privilege in the presence of blacks, especially when preoccupied or under pressure. No epiphany is great enough to undo years of indoctrination.

In order for the animal to be fully convinced, it must be exposed to hundreds or thousands of experiences in which the black person is the good guy; the better guy; the guy he roots for. This is most efficiently done with stories. The animal needs to be shown an endless parade of scenarios (movies and commercials work best) in which black people are the moral heroes.

The boy could also ruminate on the error of his ways in the privacy of his own mind, and the animal could learn from that as well, but only if the ruminations have an emotional payload. The boy must *feel* sorry in his thoughts, not merely judge himself logically wrong. *The emotion* is what gets delivered to the animal and changes his behavior.

It's counter-productive to denounce the boy as a racist even though he behaves as one. The animal inside him needs to see something demonstrated. So demonstrate it; be that moral hero. Smile at him. Offer your fist for bumping. Show him that you come in peace. Defy his expectations.

And realize that you have no idea how old that boy is today and if he's still working on undoing what they did to him. He probably is.

## **Ads**

Ads power the Internet. Stupid, repetitive ads pay for all that infinite sprawling magnificence. How is that even possible? Who's *falling* for that stuff?

Our animals, of course.

There's a beer company here in the USA that every summer pulls out the same old marketing campaign: its beer is the *colddest* beer. Is there a stupider fucking claim?

But the animal doesn't do logic. It has no idea that coldness is not intrinsic to the beer. All he sees are miserable, overheated human animals, just like himself, drinking this one particular beer—and then boom! A train arrives with winter!

Then, the next time you go to buy beer, while *you're* busy with your phone, *your animal* is busy marching you directly over to where they've placed the world's coldest beer. He stops and locks the eyes on a 24-pack. Which forces you back into the present moment. You take charge, survey the situation and distill the superior, *rational* decision. "Hmmmm, let's try this one today." Great idea, Einstein.

## **The Placebo Effect**

The animal is not sick but the logical mind has made him believe that he is—by fucking with this memories. Then one day the sugar pill is swallowed, "healing" the logical mind, which causes the animal to magically recover by, once again, the rearranging of his memories. Poor thing.

## **Chores**

Let's say you have to do some daily chore, like washing the dishes, and you loathe it. But *why* do you loathe it? After all, it's not you that's doing the work, it's the animal. You don't even know the *names* of the muscles in your body, never mind how to orchestrate them with such magnificent intricacy.

You hate washing the dishes because you'd rather be off in your thoughts, and now you can't be because you have to be present to oversee the work. The animal can't be trusted to do it on his own. He can tie his shoes on his own, but not wash dishes. So, the whole time he's washing you can't wander very far in your thoughts. And that's frustrating.

But if you truly embraced that you were working with an animal, amazing but dumb, just like a pet, you would approach everything as a team. You'd assume leadership and he'd happily submit if he felt loved and respected. He'd bend his will to the presence of your rational attention, and you would praise his work emotionally as you go. Washing the dishes would be fun and easy and your animal would get weirdly better and better at it. And you wouldn't have to watch so closely.

## **Habits**

Breaking yourself of a bad habit starts with putting an obstacle in the way of the animal. Because you're letting your animal wander on its own while you're off in your thoughts, the animal will repeat the bad habit because it's the widest road. Therefore, in order to break the habit, you have to frustrate the animal; you have to force him to call you in for assistance. And when he does, he will demand that you remove the obstacle so that he can engage in the bad habit.

Which then triggers the moment of truth. Do you—can you—tell the animal, “no, not right now”, and then deal with the ongoing blowback? Or do you give in so that you can return to the pressing issues in your mind?

Until you establish your dominance over your animal, I'm afraid you don't stand a chance.

## **Obesity**

One particular bad habit almost all of us have is overeating. As our societies become more and more complex, we spend more and more time inside our minds processing and managing information. And when we do, our animals graze unattended.

To reverse one's own obesity is the easiest thing to state and the hardest to accomplish. Here's how you do it.

Every time you eat, concentrate solely on the eating. Put down your phone and focus your mind before you start. Stay with the animal. As you chew and swallow, look at the design on the plate, or the shape of the fork or anything else in the present moment that you both can see. Fully experience eating with your animal from beginning to end. No phone, no TV, no conversation, no thought except of the food. All attention shared in a little private world containing just you and the animal and the food.

Proceed relatively slowly so that you can keep a close watch on how full you are. Once you think you might have had enough, treat your animal to a little bit more and stop, and then wait

for a full minute. You may have miscalculated. Repeat the cycle until you're *sure* you're full. Once you decide you're done, you're done. Throw away all remaining food.

Soon enough the animal will begin to complain incessantly about how hungry he is. He'll insist you submit to him and eat more. But you must dominate him instead. You must tell him: No, you've had enough. You can help him out by occupying his attention or putting him to sleep with a nap, but don't give in. Laugh at his pointless protestations. Defeat his grievances by being the good alpha, the good parent, the good friend. Tell him: I know what's best for you and I'm going to force you to do it. I own you.

Despite the way it feels in the moment, you don't have to do this every day for the rest of your life. Don't let that cause you to fall into hopelessness. You only have to do it until it becomes *routine*, until he knows when to stop on his own and receive praise for it. Which you will give. Yes, he'll need a refresher course every so often, but that's just how animals work.

Come to grips with this idea: you're inside your own pet. Just like you don't (or shouldn't) let your dog or cat overeat, don't let the animal you're inside of overeat. Train him. Train him from the inside. He will adjust and stop complaining. Nothing stands between you and a peaceful dominance over your animal if you truly want it.

## **Phobias**

The first time you realize you have some phobia, like a fear of heights, it's a huge surprise just how deep the fear runs and how quickly it gets there. But over time you forget *just* how deep and how quick.

This is because it's the animal that's afraid. In the logical world you live in, fear can only be calculated, not felt. So, if you're not regularly reminded of your fear of heights through the experiencing of it, you forget its runaway power. You can calmly tell someone, "I have a fear of heights," and not shit your pants.

## **Singing**

*You* don't sing, the animal sings. And while he does, you have a choice. You can, (1), like the good orchestra conductor, listen carefully and give kind and precise feedback. "That's not quite right. That's better. Let's stop and practice that part so that you remember it, and get it right next time without us having to try to remember not to stumble over it...nice, now you've got it. That's perfect. Let's move on."

Or, (2), you can check yourself out into a daydream where you hang out with those bad boys, ego and conscience, and leave the animal there all alone, singing poorly, exactly as he was taught to do, ingraining all his mistakes by repeating them over and over and over again.

## Self-esteem

When you have low self-esteem, you're thinking poorly of your animal. You think he's a hopeless basket case that you have to live with for the rest of your life. But you've got it exactly backwards. He is what you—and circumstance—trained him to be. And he's perfectly willing to be retrained. At literally any moment you can take charge and start the work.

If you want to like yourself—to be self-confident—you have to practice it. And here's how. In your private moments, be the method actor; find that emotional space ("this is what it feels like to be confident") and then hold yourself inside it. Once you're there, let the animal know it's where you expect him to be at all times. (Note that it's perfectly possible to be self-confident *and* humble. See Gandhi.)

Change comes slowly. You have to work really, really hard at it. You have to want it more than anything you ever wanted. It's hard to hang onto confidence. Over and over you have to stick with trying your best when it feels like it's not working. But if you can convince yourself that I'm right about one thing, that there's an animal in there with you *that can't but help but respond to the training you give it*, and you stick with it, you'll find yourself randomly struck with occasional shivers of infinite hope as you catch flashing glimpses of the progress.

You have the choice to put down your phone and use your every free moment to practice being who you want to be emotionally. Yes, you can take charge of that. You don't have to let circumstance drive your emotions.

You *can* change, but *you* have to do it. It can't be done for you. Take charge of your animal. "We're feeling confident today. All day. We'll discuss how we did right before we sleep."

## Toe Stubbing

You stub your toe really bad and it *kills*—and you're angry...*at someone else!* Who? Who are you angry at? Who failed to do his job? You know who. Your slave, the animal, the one who does all the zillion thankless tasks all day, every day, and only gets noticed when he screws up.

Shame on you. How much of *your* attention was devoted to navigation when the stubbing occurred?

## Childhood Learning Prowess

I've been talking about the two "movies" we switch back and forth between in two different ways: senses vs. thought and wakefulness vs. sleep. Two ways of saying the same thing.

There's yet a third way to say it that's especially revealing: childhood vs. adulthood. The child is born with only the animal brain online, and it's fully formed. With no thought mode available, the child is trapped in the present moment with the animal, drinking in physical experience every waking second of every day, perfecting the movement of all the muscles and drinking in language.

When you're locked in the present, you do exactly what you always do: you seek out something interesting. You look at your belly button. You look at the ants. Or the clouds. Or whatever. You're forced to find something interesting in the present moment because that's all there is to choose from! This is what it is to be a child. Stuck in the present.

And this is why learning is so easy for the child. The addictive distraction of thought isn't yet available. Paying attention is easy because it's the child's only escape from boredom.

Therefore, to learn to stay in the present moment is a return to childhood in a very real sense. Not the *ignorance* or *innocence* of childhood—but the *focus*. Do you see this? It's the most important thing Slippin Fall will ever tell you. If you can return to the childhood mode, you'll be able to learn again, and you'll be more sensitive to everything going on about you. You'll be forced to give your full attention to the people around you when you interact with them. And that will make them feel loved. Because that's what love is—the gift of attention. The person you've always wanted to be is waiting for you in the present moment. Teach yourself to hold on to it.

## Implementation

OK, now we're going to get into the nitty-gritty details.

### Short-term Memory is Shared

We've talked about how we're subconsciously juggling two separate experiences when we're awake. One is the slightly-delayed facsimile of what the animal is experiencing through the senses. The other is our thoughts, which are little baby dreams, inside of which a simulated animal is morally guided through a simulated reality by ego and conscience—and we typically don't remember any of it.

Though the two worlds seem to be experienced simultaneously, they're not. At every instant you're in one or the other. It's like switching back and forth between two TV channels super fast—so quickly that you get the impression you're seeing all of both of them. But you're not. You're missing small parts of the one when you're watching the other.

What joins the two worlds is a *shared short-term memory*. The longer you stay in one of the worlds, the more room in short-term memory it eats up. The eating up of memory necessarily *overwrites* some of what the other world has put there.

So when you see the big hairy spider, all of your short-term memory is quickly consumed with a crystal clear representation of the outside world, and you've completely lost your train of thought. And when you wander in your thoughts, short-term memory is slowly consumed by your daydreams so you don't have room in there to hold on to what your spouse is saying to you even though you heard every single word perfectly clearly.

## **Sleep /S the Disconnection of Short-term Memory from Long-term Memory**

Think about what happens when your morning alarm goes off in the middle of a dream. For a fraction of a second, the dream is there for the taking. But before you even realize you have the chance to remember it, the dream is being overwritten by everything that comes flooding in through your senses upon waking.

The same thing happens when you're lost in thought, when you're off in a daydream and then snap out of it. You have that split second to remember what you were thinking about, at least the very end of it, but you rarely do.

So, why is memory turned off in dreams (and in daydreams)? Mostly it's to facilitate the job of keeping reality and imagination separate—to make it easier to keep track of what actually happened and what didn't. But there's more to it.

Some of the grist for the daydream mill is things you've chosen to hide from yourself, especially things you're ashamed of. You need to manipulate those things inside daydreams because they're important for the decisions made there, but you don't want to be reminded of them in consciousness. Because if you are, then the animal knows about them—and may blurt them out when you're off in a daydream and it's running the show.

And there's another, even somewhat sinister, reason you don't remember your daydreams. Some of the nasty, selfish conclusions the conscience lets the angry ego get away with can't stand the light of logical day. That bitch/bastard totally fucking deserved what s/he fucking got. (Yikes.)

## **The Animal Owns Long-term Memory**

So how do you remember *any* of your thoughts if you're asleep when you're having them and you don't have time to grab them out of short-term memory before they're overwritten? You take very short trips into your daydreams. Once inside the daydream, instead of remaining on the thought train indefinitely, you hop off after just a couple of stops. Upon waking from the daydream, you glance quickly into short-term memory and capture those thoughts before they get overwritten.

This is the mode you're in when you problem solve, when you do your homework. You jump quickly in and out of the dream world repeatedly. If what's in there is not interesting, the work is painful and exhausting. Welcome to first grade.

After you've grabbed the thoughts from short-term memory, you pass them on to the animal by translating them into emotions, which is the language the animal understands. You hold them in your mind and you "feel" what they mean.

Passing the thoughts as emotions to the animal puts them into *long-term* memory. **The animal owns long term memory.** The animal's model of the world *is* long-term memory.

Consider an example. Imagine you're stuck somewhere without your phone, so you're wandering in your thoughts and you pop out of the wandering with the realization that you forgot to do something super important that you promised you would. But you don't have anything to write this down with. You're just going to have to remember it.

How do you make sure you do? You hold the thought in your mind and press down upon it with a deep *emotional* payload. You can't just say to yourself, "Oh, this is super important, don't forget this again." No, you have to *feel* its importance. And the deeper you feel it, the more likely you are to remember it.

Of course, you have to additionally set an alarm of sorts by associating the memory with something the animal will bump into later, and then stop, and ask for further direction. But that's too far into the weeds for our purposes right now. The main point here is that accessing long-term memory requires communing with the animal.

## **We Are Focus**

As we discussed previously, our experience of reality is as a part of consciousness, the logical part of the brain. But we're not *all* of consciousness. We're not the ego and we're not the conscience. We hear/feel them battle it out in our daydreams, but we're just an observer there, not an agent.

**The only power we have is to choose to focus on what the animal is experiencing; to refuse to daydream; to stay in the present moment. We are the focus component in consciousness.** (The animal has its own focus component. You notice it when you duck before you realize something's coming at you.)

This is a huge claim and if true, a giant insight. It means that although we're taking responsibility for everything we do, thinking we're in control, orchestrating all we do, we're not. We're watching. We're only watching—be it dreams or reality—at all times.

According to me, our sole purpose is to override *the animal's* focus component when there's something *logically* important in the world which needs attention. By doing this, we force the ego and conscience to logically navigate *the real world*.

Typically though, there's nothing in need of logical triage in the world around us, so we must either find something that is (and it's usually on our phones) or suffer a fall into daydreams.

But this can be hacked. At the most primitive level, we can simply choose to stare at something! And over time, we can elevate the present moment to *always* being logically fascinating by just incrementally *declaring it to be so*, by falling in love with it. If you've spent any quality time inside Walt Whitman's poetry, you've experienced this mode vicariously.



## Second Summary

Imagine that you own a dog, and through some new-fangled technology, you can communicate with him. You've got a chip in your brain, and he's got a chip in his. The two chips work together to translate.

Now, you're not getting an English translation of what's going on in the dog's mind, just the sensations he's feeling, which you experience as emotions. On his end, he's receiving the sensation of strings of sounds from you. But with a little bit of detective work, you can both figure stuff out.

For example, after a while you can *feel* exactly which neighborhood dog's pee he's smelling. And he can recognize sequences of sounds as names of things you're referring to. Not a perfect system by any means, but entirely workable.

Now, further imagine that every night you invite your friends (ego and conscience) to dinner and engage them in gossip and philosophical conversations. While those conversations are happening, you *could* be using the chip in your head to keep the dog up to date with the conversation, but you don't. You think he's too dumb. And he *is* too dumb, but his being included in the conversation is also deeply critical to your success in the world.

This is because as a condition of getting the brain chips installed you had to agree to offload your long-term memory to the dog. That being the case, if you don't use your chip to send to the dog what's being said by your friends, by emotionally savoring it a bit, you won't remember it. In other words, you will have failed to be "a good listener".

Furthermore, the dog needs to be respected. If you expect him to behave well when you're not watching, you need to constantly track and respect his presence. If he doesn't see himself as a well-behaving beta, under a constant sun of surveillance and approval, he wanders as the alpha.

In the real world, you have exactly this type of communication going on in your head with your animal (brain), but you use it to treat him as a slave. You ignore him except when you need him to do something; then you blame him for doing what he was trained to do. Or wasn't trained to do. Then you refuse to take the time to train him to do it right; you denigrate him instead. As if that were sufficient training.

Stop here and begin again. Do whatever it is you have to do to convince yourself that there's an animal in there with you, and that the two of you are a team at all times. You're the leader, but you let him know you understand you're nothing without him. If you can do this, never again will you be alone and afraid in your mind.

Keeping your animal in the conversation is the key to everything.

## Diagrams

There are three diagrams, all basically the same diagram with minor differences within. We'll spend most of our time with the first one, which is titled "Driving". It represents the mode in which we're dominating the animal by paying full attention to the present moment. We're paying attention to the outside world as the body moves through time, even if the body is idle, just sitting in a chair doing nothing.

The other two are titled "Daydreaming" (we're lost in thought, letting the animal drive) and "Hallucinating" (we're failing to keep the other two modes cleanly separated).

It's important to remember that when we're *not* hallucinating, we're *flipping between* the first two modes many times a second without realizing it. For instance, suppose we're checking the environment for the first 2/10 of every second, and at the end of that 2/10 of a second, a *snapshot of what we're observing* is taken and saved off into short-term memory. Then, a similar, previously-saved *thought* snapshot is loaded. Once *that's* the running program, we spend the next 7/10s of our second riding the thought train. Then *it* gets unloaded and saved, and the previously saved senses snapshot is loaded for another 2/10s of a second. This loop repeats, back and forth between the two modes—saving, loading, experiencing; saving loading, experiencing—until we fall asleep in bed at night. The allocation of the tenths of the seconds varies depending on how interesting the outside world is. If big hairy spider requires 9/10 of the second spent with the senses, then washing the dishes is probably 4/10.

If you've done the math in the paragraph above, you've realized that all the saving and loading of short-term memory contents takes up only 1/10 of each second. But a tenth of a second is a long time for a brain. And it's easier to *copy* information around than it is to take in new information and *process* it.

(I've used tenths of seconds for simplicity's sake, but surely it's being done on the order of milliseconds.)

So the upcoming three diagrams represent the three different modes the mind can be in *inbetween* the loading and saving of snapshots. In the first mode, when we're experiencing only what the senses provide with no analysis, we exist in a starkly brilliant and lonely world. (Orgasm is extreme commitment to this mode.) In the second mode, we're completely unaware of where we are—the physical world is a zillion miles away, or doesn't even exist—and we're trying thoughts on for size inside a perfectly silent and perfectly dark dressing room. (Nighttime dreaming is the extreme here.) In the third mode, we've gone totally off the track; some thoughts that should be stored only on the thought side of short-term memory have been written to the senses side. The imagined has turned real. It's time to get help. Or start a religion.

### Driving Mode

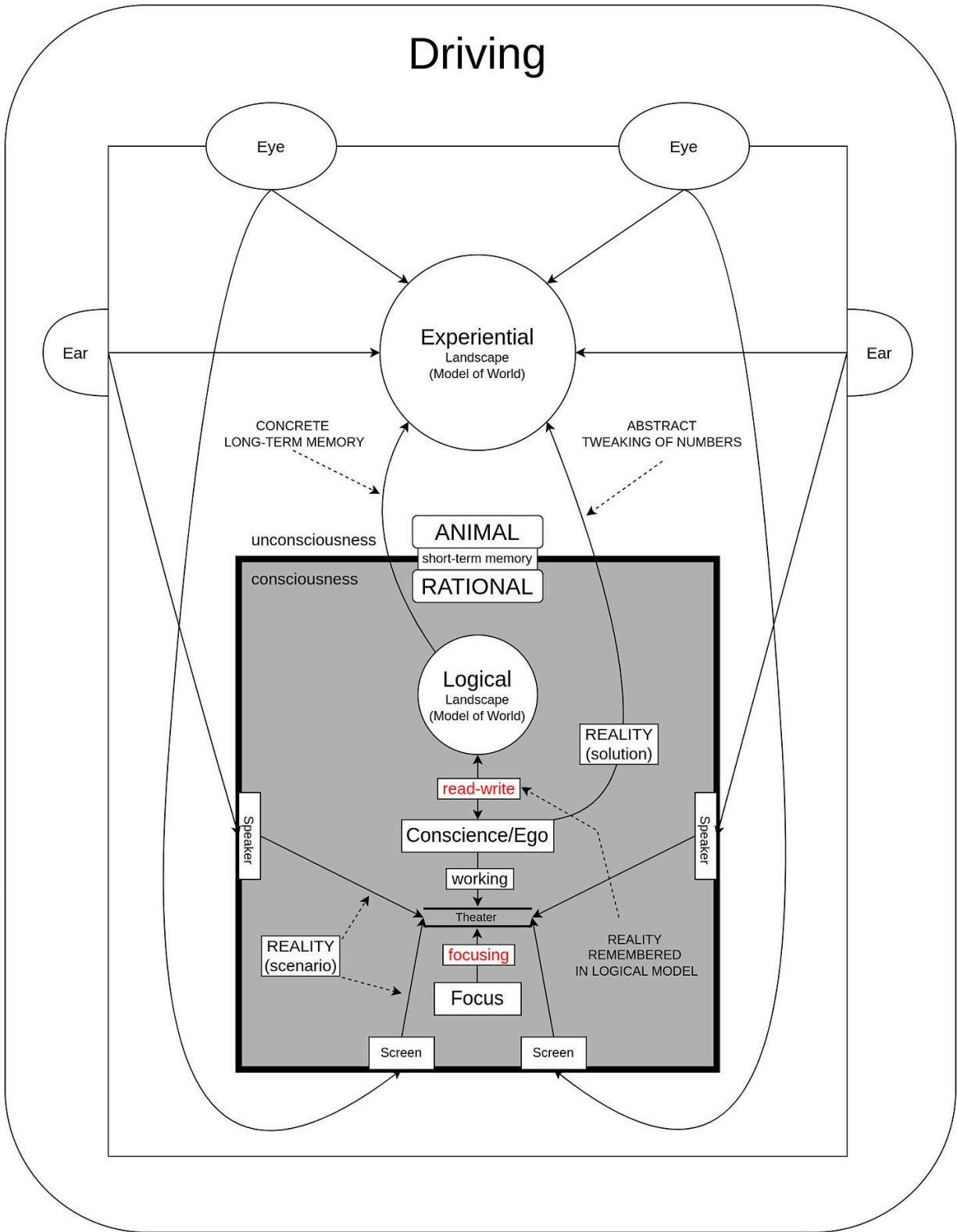
In each of the diagrams we've got a bird's-eye view of a "vivisected" human brain. Everything in white is part of the animal brain—unconsciousness. Everything in the big, gray embedded

rectangle is the rational brain—consciousness. The circles inside the two parts represent their respective “models of the world”, which we described earlier as their systems for determining what to do next.

At the edges of the animal brain are the eyes and ears. Each of these external organs sends data to both consciousness *and* unconsciousness. (We’ve left out the objectification of the data that causes the delay in the delivery to consciousness.) Inside the rectangular consciousness room, we see that the input from the eyes and ears is directed into a theater. In this first “Driving” diagram, Conscience and Ego are in the theater doing their thing using *reality* as input—they’re analyzing what’s happening outside in the real world by way of a morality-drenched court case. (Ego: She is being sooooo f’ing annoying. Conscience: No she’s not, she’s in distress. Go help her out.)

Together in the consciousness room with them, and just watching, is a third player: Focus. Focus’s level of interest in what’s happening in the outside world is what’s determining how many tenths of each second gets spent looking at the outside world. As Focus’s interest in the outside world drops with respect to whatever seductive thought the (unconscious) animal brain has come up with for Conscience and Ego to fight over, the time they spend observing the real world drops with it.

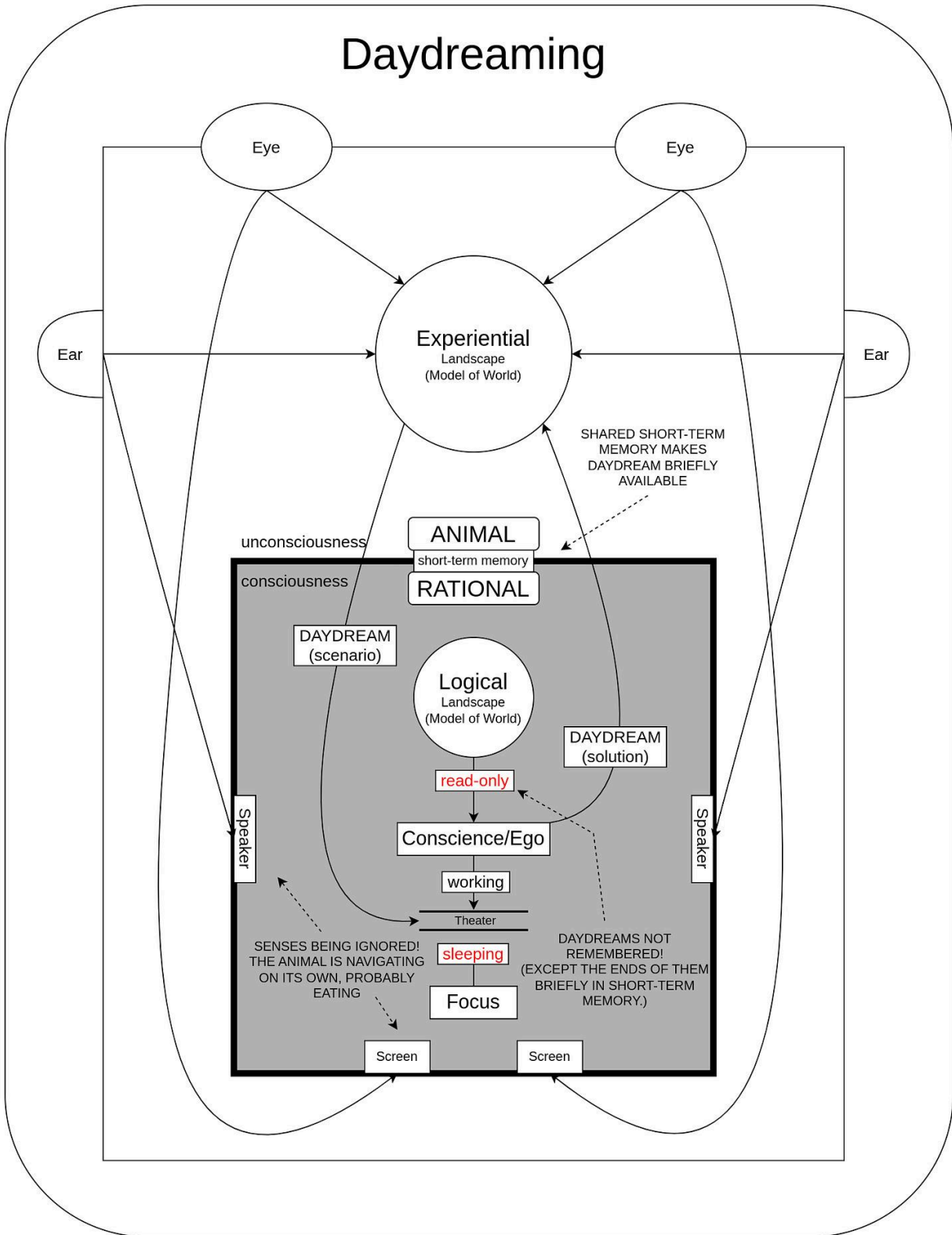
In Driving Mode, the verdicts reached by Conscience/Ego about the real world are written to both models of the world. **By default, we tend to remember anything significant we witness in the outside world.**



## Daydreaming Mode

This second diagram is almost exactly like the first, but now what Conscience and Ego are arguing about is coming from the *inside*—which is some *simulated* reality. Focus is asleep; he's watching but not remembering, so the verdicts reached in this mode get passed only to the animal's model of the world "behind his back". **By default, we don't remember our daydreams.** We have the opportunity to try to remember them, at least the ends of them, but it takes practice, and it's often disturbing.

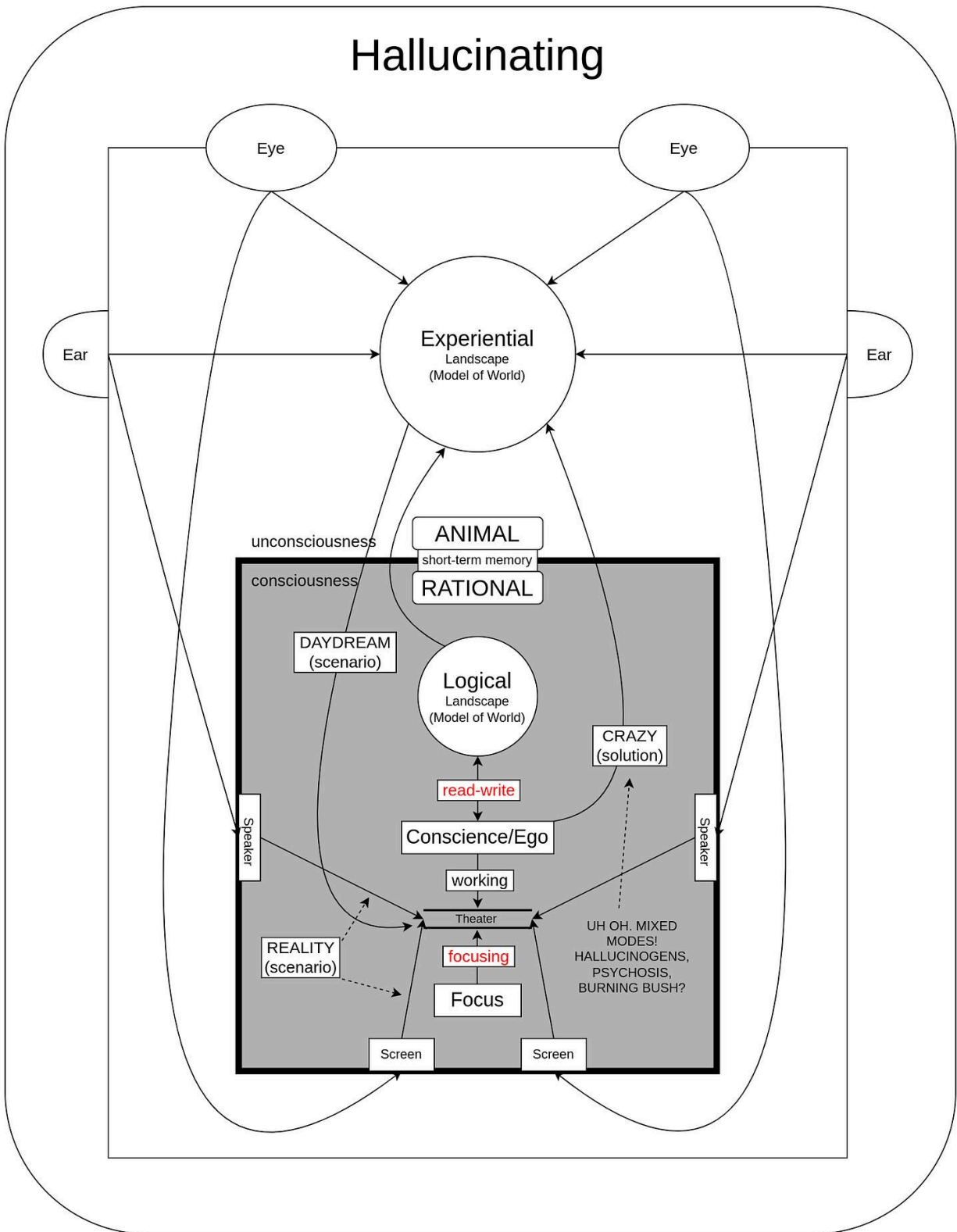
# Daydreaming



## **Hallucinating Mode**

In this third diagram, the failure to keep the two modes separate results in a seriously distorted perception of reality.

# Hallucinating





## Third and Final Summary

Moral behavior is a requirement for a fulfilling life, but it's not the end game; claiming and holding dominion over short-term memory is. If you control short-term memory, you can populate it as you like. You can choose your mood and hold it in place. You can train yourself (your animal) to sing or dance. You can listen without judging. You can sit in silence and be perfectly relaxed, keeping pesky and draining thoughts at bay simply by occupying short-term memory with what you see and hear and feel around you. You can win that control by establishing dominance over the unconscious animal, who fights to have short-term memory dedicated to *thought* instead. He thinks he can handle the present on his own, and he can, but poorly.

To *completely* dominate the animal—to *fully* own short-term memory *at all times*—is to be a holy person. If you met Jesus or Mohammed or Joan of Arc or Gandhi or name-your-holy-person, you would simply be overwhelmed by the depth of the attention they had at their command. When they looked at you, every signal you were emitting through your voice and your body language would be received and intuited. Even without them speaking back to you, you would feel that you were being heard at a much deeper level than you ever had before.

You'd see that they weren't running away into their thoughts to check to see if what you're saying is a good thing, or the right thing, or a jumping off point to some other thought. Because they've mastered their attention, they're not required to do any of that, and so they don't. They simply listen. Easiest thing in the world. They let the evidence gather itself until you're done. They nod in agreement and remain silent. Only if you ask for their thoughts will they turn to them.

And when they return from their thoughts, it's always with questions. "Have you considered this? Have you tried this?" They know they don't have answers, so they don't pretend they do; they're simply co-reasoning with you. But because their honest questions tend to take the conversation to places you haven't been letting yourself visit, when you walk away without an answer, you find that you've been set on a path to find it yourself.

But *you* don't need to be a holy person, *you* don't need to *completely* dominate the animal. You only need to spend more time *outside* your thoughts than inside—on average, over the course of every day.

It's not about being good or smart or popular or rich or pretty or polite, although all of those things help to make everything else so much easier. No, what it's *truly* about is you being tough enough to schoolmarm (or drill-sergeant) your animal into submission, which you accomplish by merely staying in the present, as counter-intuitive as that may feel.

It's winning freedom from your addiction to thought. It's relaxing your mind in the hammock at the beach that is the present moment. It's doing nothing more than holding your quiet attention in waiting for what's coming in the next moment, all the while remaining utterly unafraid of

whatever that might be. Your animal may occasionally get spooked. Check it out with him and reason him down appropriately.

## Last Thoughts

You've been told that will power doesn't exist, that the extended capture of your attention is something you can't have. I call bullshit on that. Just because no graduate student can do it in a lab for \$5 doesn't mean *nobody* can. I say *everybody* can. I say it's just practice.

I say the attention is a muscle and holding the attention is just another thing the animal can be trained to do.

The fight to remain in the present moment is a game in which you die in the first few seconds every time you play. And you don't even see it coming because you always get hit from behind. And when the game restarts, depending on how long you were gone, you might not even remember you were *playing* the game, so you lose again, immediately. You drop directly back into another daydream.

So, here's how you make some initial progress in the game.

Tie the playing of the game to *the picking up* of your phone. Not *the use* of your phone; I'm not going to tell you to ditch your phone altogether; not at all. All I'm asking is that you stop and ask yourself this question, "Am I in the mood to surrender 10 seconds of my phone time right now to trying to keep my vision perfectly clear, all the way to the edges?" You can stare at something, or you can let your eyes wander; just steel yourself into refusing to surrender the clarity of a single pixel—all the way to the edges—while you count to ten. Then off you go to Mr. Beast.

Even if, every single time, you end up saying no to the surrendering of the ten seconds, you've still made a giant leap. You're remembering that there's a game to be played. And that's literally half the battle. You can't win if you can't remember you can play.

If you happen to be lucky, curious, and at a relative lull in your life, maybe you'll continue on with the game by actually surrendering the 10 seconds every so often. And if you do, maybe you'll get a little obsessed with it. And if you do, then you're on your way.

But here's the one thing you must NEVER, EVER do: go off to a monastery. DO NOT change your life one iota. This is a thing that must be done in the margins, in the cracks of your life that you've been allocating to relaxation and entertainment. Why in the cracks? Because you're almost guaranteed to fail at it. Going to the monastery is like investing your life savings into one large lottery jackpot. Don't do it.

Most likely, you'll find that very quickly you stop even asking yourself the question when you pick up your phone. And that's fine. You've read this far; the seed has been planted. You'll come back when you're ready. We'll miss you.

For those of you who will do the missing, the ones who are already bowling pins struck by cannonballs: when you right yourselves, I expect you'll find each other by the looks in your eyes. And then you'll go on to change the world.

And after you do, you'll refer back to the paradigm shift as The Attention Revolution. And you'll attribute it all to that damn Slippin Fall.

### **CAUTION: Just an Act**

Remember, Slippin Fall is not an expert. He's not only *not* a psychologist, he's not even a scientist. Or a Ph.D. He's talking out his ass.

**If you choose to take any of the advice given in the preceding *performance*, please, do it with a licensed mental health expert in tow.**